

Article

Repair in English and Japanese Disagreement Discourse: Communication Pattern and Second Language Acquisition

Manuscript received April 4, 2011

The Bulletin of Institute of Technologists, No. 2 (2011) 54~59

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate communication patterns in disagreement discourse in English and Japanese daily conversation, focusing on “repair” in conversational interaction. The study analyses both English and Japanese daily conversation data in which disagreement occurs and considers the conversational style that speakers use when they find some disagreeable elements or mistakes in co-participant’s utterances. This study reveals that the differences in communication patterns are affected by how people frame the world and use language from the perspective of cultural values and politeness. The study will also explore which conversation style and communication patterns speakers employ when they are speaking their second language. The study will consider how speakers’ use of the different patterns correlates to their level of ability in their non-native language.

Key Words : Repair, communication pattern, second language acquisition, conversation analysis

1. Introduction

“Human language” is closely related to its user. My previous studies have investigated conversation structure in its cultural and social context. My approach assumes that speech cannot be understood fully without careful attention to the situation its users exist in, the groups they belong to and the world view that frames their thoughts. My previous investigations of conversation structure have shown that differences exist between English and Japanese communication patterns and at the level of human cognition that is embodied in the way language is used.

Furthermore, by observing how people use communication patterns when they speak their first and second language, these analyses have demonstrated that speakers acquire additional communication patterns

gradually according to their level of second language acquisition.

When people learn a second language, they have to acquire not only grammar but also pragmatic competence and the different cultural values that accompany that language. How do people acquire their additional language? Which elements do people acquire first and which elements do people have difficulty in learning?

Building on the results of my previous studies, this study will attempt to investigate communication patterns in disagreement discourse in English and Japanese daily conversation, focusing on “repair” in conversation. The study analyses both English and Japanese daily conversation data in which disagreement occurs and considers the conversational style that speakers use when

they find some disagreeable elements or mistakes in co-participant's utterances. Who corrects mistakes? ¹⁾ Where do speakers correct them? How do speakers express disagreement towards what co-participants said in previous utterance in conversational interaction? And what kind of conversational sequence continues after these corrections happen?

<Research Question 1>

Do speakers use the same strategies in both English and Japanese conversations in which disagreement occurs?

<Research Question 2>

Do speakers use their own communication patterns or use second language patterns when they speak their second language?

This study will reveal that the difference of communication patterns is affected by how people frame the world and use language from the perspective of cultural values and politeness. The study will also explore which conversation style and communication patterns speakers employ when they are speaking their second language. This will be done by analysing the conversations of speakers at different stages of acquisition of their second language and comparing their speaking style with native speakers. The study will also consider how speakers' use of the different patterns correlates to their level of ability in their non-native language.

2. Methodology

2.1 Conversation Data

The data in this study consists of naturally-occurring interactions, videotaped and transcribed, in which pairs talk about given topics freely. Speakers talk about some topics in both English and Japanese. These conversation data were collected in the United States and in Japan. Speakers are:

- (1) Japanese native speakers

These are divided into three levels, according to the level of their second language (English) acquisition, using TOEIC scores. These levels are: (i) elementary (under 500), (ii) intermediate (500-750) and (iii) advanced (750 +).

- (2) English native speakers who live in Japan and the United States and have experience of studying Japanese: and English native speakers from America, Britain, Canada and New Zealand who live in Japan. They are divided into three groups, according to the level of their second language acquisition (around 3-5 speakers at each level). The levels are: (i) elementary level, (ii) intermediate level, and (iii) advanced level.

Conversations in pairs are video-recorded and transcribed in detail. Video is utilized in this study as it captures important elements of conversation such as facial expressions, attitude, behaviour and gestures made by the participants, all of which are effective and supportive when analysing verbal interaction.

2.2 Repair in conversation

Speakers correct themselves when they find mistakes in what they just said²⁾. Correction is commonly understood to refer to the replacement of an "error" or "mistake" by what is correct. Shegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) ³⁾ use the term "repair" to refer to these corrections, including other various kinds of strategies.

A "repair" is a kind of correction and Shegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) divided this concept into "self repair" and "other repair", which is judged by who corrects who. They further divided repairs into Self-initiated repair and Other-initiated repair according to who initiates them.

<Repair Type>

- (i) X-Y-Y type

Utterance (speaker A)



Correction (speaker B)



Acceptance of correction (speaker A)

A: They are going to drive back Wednesday

B: Tomorrow.

A: Tomorrow. Right.

(ii) X-Y- X type

Utterance



Correction



Rejection of correction

A: That was a gas leak.

B: It was an oil leak.

A: It was a gas leak.

3. Analyses

In observing the conversational interaction, differences of communication patterns in English and Japanese conversation in which disagreement occurs are observed.

3.1 English Data

Example 1

(What do you like to do in your holiday?)

< A= Alissa D= Dan >

1A: Which is easy?

2D: Right.

3A: Who's Dong? Oh, Dong the organizer.

→ 4D: Dong's the tennis guy. (Other-repair)

As shown in this example, D corrects what the prior speaker A said in line 4. This is Other-initiated other repair. As Shegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) note, other initiated repairs are positioned successively (they occupy adjacent turns). This kind of repair is basic type and is also observed in the Japanese data.

Example 2

< A= Alissa D= Dan >

1A: Are you going to do both the Saturday and also the ...

2D: I think my plan is to try and do ... play on the Tuesday night and then if

3D: I can't make Tuesday do the practice on the Monday night.

4A: Practice on Monday nights?

5D: yep.

6A: How come you never did that?

7D: I did do that all summer.

→ 8A: No, I mean last summer, though. (other-initiated Other repair)

→ 9D: I wasn't on the team.

→ (silence occurs)

→ 10 A: No, I'm talking about the citizens' schools team. (Other-initiated Other repair)

→ 11 D: The citizens' school team's not a team.

12 A: Right, but that's Tuesday nights,

→ 13 D: That's Tuesday nights.

14 A: so Monday night is the Saturday practice.

→ 15 D: Yes.

→ 16 A: Okay. I wasn't clear that.

17 D: Yeah. And so, so sometimes I'll go to the Monday practice which will work much better.

18 A: Singles.

In this example, A and D are talking about what D likes to do on holidays (he likes playing tennis). A thinks that D does not understand what A is talking about and A does not agree with D says, so, A is trying to solve the situation by using "repair" as is clear in line 8. D rejects A's repair in line 9. Then, silence occurs after line 9, which can mean that A disagrees with D's reply to her and nothing was solved by her repair. A expresses "repair" again in line 10, but the sequence is repeated in line 11 in which D once more rejects A's repair.

Next, in line 13 and 15, D now accepts A's repair.

These sequences continue until A and D accept the content of what they are talking about completely and

troubles and all problems in utterances are resolved between them. A completely agrees with D in line 16.

3.2 Japanese Data

Next, we will consider the Japanese data.

Example 3 (What do you like to do?)

(K = Kohei T = Tsukasa)

[1T]: あ, そうだ, 特技だ. 趣味は何にしたの, あ, そっちね, ポスターカード集めです.

(Oh, by the way, what did you put down for your hobby? Oh, I put it down as a poster cards collection.)

→ [2K]: ポストカード集め. (Collection of postcards)

[3T]: ポスターカード集めで, これは中学2年生くらいのときに,

(I began to collect them around a second year of junior high school.)

4K: うん. (I see.)

5T: 塾の友達が, あの1枚すごく, つかさの, この, 目線と似てるような目線の,

(A friend of mine at prep school found and gave me a poster card which is very close to my taste.)

6K: うん. (Oh, I see.)

7T: あのポスターカードを見つけて, わたしポスターカード好きだったの, くれたところから,

(I used to like them.)

8T: こうポスターカード見るようになって, それから, あの, 旅行に行ったときも,

9T: 必ずポスターカードって置いてあるの.

(But since then, every time I travel I look for poster cards at souvenir stores.)

10S: あるね. (Yes, they do have them.)

11T: 地域の, 置いてあって,

(It differs from place to place)

→ [12K]: ポスターカード? ポストカード? どっち?

(You mean poster card or post card?)

→ [13T]: ポストカードかな.

(I think it's a post card.)

14K: ポストカード. (Post card.)

[15T]: 150円くらいで売ってる,

(They are sold at around 150 yen respectively.)

In this example, speaker T uses an incorrect word. She mistakenly uses “poster card” instead of “post card”. The word “post card” is the correct one. Speaker K is trying to make her realize it by using “repair” in line 2. However, speaker T does not change her mistake (or she does not seem to realize her mistake) in line 3. Maybe she does not realize her choice of mistaken word. Speaker K does not dare to deny her mistake again in line 4, though he knows she is still not correct. Then, she continues to use the mistaken word “poster card” in lines 7 to 9, after which speaker K tries to make her understand which word is correct “poster card” or “post card” by using repair again in line 12. This is delayed repair

Speaker T now understands and expresses her understanding of which is correct in line 13, but she uses the Japanese word “kana” (which translates as modal verb “may” in English). She uses the expression “I think it's a ‘post card.’” not the expression “it is ‘post card’”. As shown in this sequence in the Japanese data, acceptance or rejection do not occur successively, that is to say, they do not occur immediately after repair occurs.

Unlike the English disagreement discourse in example 2 in which speakers immediately try to solve the problem in their conversation and make the meaning clear and avoid uncertainty of content so that the conversation can progress, in the Japanese counterpart, speakers can delay their trouble-shooting sequence. That is to say, conversation can progress in Japanese without a complete solution as to the trouble in their conversation.

K is trying to talk cooperatively by not expressing direct denial. That is to say, considering the phase of politeness, speakers can express politeness by not using a direct denial expression in Japanese conversation. In English, it may be polite when speakers positively correct mistakes and make them clear.

3.3 Communication Pattern of Second Language

Next, this study considers which conversation style and communication patterns speakers employ when they are speaking their second language. Do they (1) use their own language communication patterns or (2) use second language patterns? Are differences observed in conversation in accordance with second language acquisition level?

At an elementary level, speakers tend to use mostly self-repairs when they speak their second language.

< Example 4> Tim and Harry

H: うん…うん…私は、全然、スキーしたことがない。でも、したくない。ちょっと、怖そうな (笑い) こと…

(Un, unn...nn..., I have not skied before.

But I do not want to do it because it seems a little bit scared...(laugh)...))

T: 私は、あ～あ～、日本語で、あ～

日本語が勉強します。あ～勉強して、したいです。(を)

(I want to ... want to ... in Japanese, uhm... Japanese study ...Urm...I study.. would like to study Japanese.)

In example 4, the speaker is using the postpositional particle “ga” (the nominative case), where he should have used “wo” (the objective case). He self-repairs it. These repairs are also observed in Japanese speakers. At an elementary level, other-initiated repairs seldom occur in disagreement discourse.

<Example 5>

(Graham and Robert)

G: で、投票があったんですね。それはあの～自由で、あの～、投票、投票したんです。

(You know, there was an election.

Uhm, it was urm... a free election.)

R: ah.

G: で、で、それでたぶん... (and..and it maybe...)

R: 全部、全部のレストランと？

(All... At all restaurants?)

G: そう。そう全部のレストランとバーが、禁煙になっていない。

(Yep. Not every restaurant is for no-smoking.)

R: 別の部屋があれば？

(If we have designated smoking rooms...)

G: それはあのなかったことにしたいですね。で、例えばプライベートクラブ、

(I think they will be ignored.

And, for example, private clubs.)

R: aha

G: で、あの～、たばこを吸うことができるというアイデアもあったんですね。

(There was an idea that people can smoke at designated areas.)

1R: パブリック。

(public.)

→2G: パブリックじゃなくてプライベート

(Not public but private club.)

→3R: プライベート。

(private)

4 G: クラブ。でも、そ、それは、それでも、

5 G: あのそういうクラブでももう禁煙になった。

(Club, but, th..they...even at those clubs smoking was banned.)

→6R: もう禁煙になる。

(Smoking will be banned (at all clubs).)

→7G: なります...そう。(Will be... Yeah.)

8R: aha

9G: そうですね。(Right.)

10R: 吸いたい人はどこで吸う？

(Where do smokers go to smoke?)

Speakers are advanced level speakers but who have little difficulty in communicating in Japanese. In example 5, speaker G corrects (in line 2 (2G)) what speaker R said and R accepts in line 3.

As seen in examples in which they use English, speakers correct mistakes and immediately solve the problem caused by their mistakes. We can say that they also employ their English speaking pattern in using

Japanese.

Next, when Japanese speakers use English, elementary level speakers use mostly self corrections and use other-initiated repair only when they correct simple word-level mistakes. They do not correct the contents of conversation. In the same way, Japanese speakers employ their Japanese communication patterns in which an uncertain sequence can continue when they use English as seen in Example 6 (line 9).

<Example 6>

(Japanese speakers are talking about overseas trip in English)

1S: In Chile? Australia and Chile?

2T: Or Chile.

→3S: Or Chile, OK.

4T: Machu Picchu, I want to see.

5S: Why Machu Picchu?

6T: String...string thing.

7S: String thing?

8T: To be continued.

→9S: OK, OK, next time.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that

(1) As seen in examples in which disagreements occur, we can understand that there exist differences between English and Japanese conversation in how to solve misunderstandings or disagreements. In other words, they use different communication styles.

In English conversation, speakers try to solve problems by explaining what is correct and what they really wanted to say. On the other hand, in Japanese conversation, speakers talk cooperatively, show empathy and consider harmony in conversation to be important. Japanese speakers show that they care primarily for the relation with the other participant in a conversation. How to use repair

and how to express politeness is different between English and Japanese.

Disagreement and indication of others' mistakes or uncertainty are usually considered as dispreferred turn sequences.⁴⁾ This study indicated that how speakers use strategies to express politeness is very different between English and Japanese conversation: and what is preferred in interaction is also different between these two languages.

(2) As proficiency level rises, other initiated repairs are observed. Acquisition of pragmatic competence such as communication patterns is difficult to acquire, as shown in examples in which speakers still employ their own styles when they use their second language.

Transcription

... or ... indicates pause (the number of dots shows pause length)

~ indicates prolongation or stretching of the sound

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